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SUBJECT: Minister of Social Affairs Sacked

¶1. (SBU) Summary: President Kabila issued a decree on January 9 dismissing Minister of Social Affairs, Humanitarian Action and National Solidarity Barthelemy Botswali for "conducting himself in a dishonorable manner." There are various rumors floating around to explain his dismissal, but most center around some kind of internal dispute (physical and political) within Botswali's party, the Coalition of Congolese Democrats (CODECO), which is part of the ruling coalition, the Alliance for the Presidential Majority (AMP). Most observers welcomed the move, as Botswali had been under continual suspicion of having embezzled government funds. Although CODECO has already staked claim to Botswali's portfolio, and perhaps another ministry, Kabila may bypass CODECO in any government re-shuffle, which, with four ministerial vacancies, probably looms on the near-term horizon. End summary.

¶2. (U) On January 9, Congolese National Radio and Television (RTNC) announced that President Kabila had dismissed Minister of Social Affairs, Humanitarian Action and National Solidarity Barthelemy Botswali for comporting himself in a dishonorable manner. Botswali is a member of the Coalition of Congolese Democrats (CODECO), which is in turn part of the ruling coalition, the Alliance for the Presidential Majority (AMP). CODECO has 27 of the AMP's 256 deputies in the National Assembly. He was nominated to this position in October 2008 following the last government re-shuffle. He was apparently fired as a civil servant during the Mobutu era. He is ethnic Sakata, a native of the Mai-Ndombe District in Bandundu Province.

¶3. (SBU) There are several rumors about the reason for Botswali's dismissal, with most centering on some kind of dispute within CODECO. One source claimed that Botswali, who had allegedly been drinking heavily, became involved in a physical fight at a January 3 meeting of CODECO members in Kinshasa. In a slight twist on this story, there are rumors that Botswali arrived at the party meeting with a former girlfriend, the wife of another CODECO member, who then allegedly attacked Botswali and the woman. Other analysts noted that Botswali had constantly been at loggerheads with the CODECO Chairman, Jean-Claude Muyambo, whose ministerial portfolio Botswali had replaced. The National Assembly summoned Botswali several times over the past year to respond to questions, most notably, accusations that he had embezzled humanitarian assistance. Independent daily Le Potentiel speculated that Kabila fired Botswali for tampering with CODECO's electoral list.

¶4. (SBU) Botswali publicly accepted Kabila's decision, thanking Kabila for the opportunity to serve in the government and professing his loyalty to the AMP (Comment: Botswali must try to remain in the AMP's good favor to try to avoid any embezzlement investigations. End comment). Many observers/press praised the

decision to get rid of Botswali, who was constantly dogged by charges of mismanagement and embezzlement. Under the headline "Joseph Kabila Should Go Further," Le Potential editorialized that Botswali's behavior embodied the "scorn for ethics that characterizes certain cabinet ministers, deputies, and parastatal administrators."

15. (SBU) Comment: Botswali's dismissal was a positive step, which could serve as a small opening to emphasize the GDRC's commitment to fight corruption. With his resignation, there are now four ministerial portfolios vacant (Social Affairs, Economy, Relations with Parliament, and Scientific Research). This will most likely give additional impetus to the prospect of a much-awaited government re-shuffle. Although CODECO is an important piece of the AMP jigsaw puzzle and CODECO leaders have already staked claim to a least one ministry, it is not certain that one of its members will replace Botswali. Kabila may use his dismissal as a pretext for filling the slot with a member of the former rebel group, the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP). End comment.
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